

## **WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM**

### **PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:**

The primary goals of the BLM-Montana Wild Horse and Burro Program are to manage wild horses in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (PMWHR); conduct adoptions of excess wild horses from the PMWHR; and support the national program by adopting out wild horses from herd management areas in other states.

### **ISSUES:**

The Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 as amended mandates the BLM and Forest Service to manage healthy self-sustaining herds of wild horses and burros in a manner that achieves and maintains a “thriving natural ecological balance on public lands while maintaining multiple use relationship in that area.” It also directs the BLM to remove excess animals and place them with qualified adopters. Subsequently, the BLM is responsible for compliance inspections ensuring the humane treatment of adopted animals and the titling of animals into private ownership.

Montana’s only free-roaming wild horses are in the Pryor Mountains, about 60 miles south of Billings. These animals are reputed to be of Spanish ancestry. Although portions of the PMWHR were established through a [secretarial](#) order in 1968, the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 superseded that direction. The Pryor Mountain Herd Management Area Plan, written in 1984 and revised in 1992, guides management of the range.

The BLM released a draft evaluation of the PMWHR on November 19, 2007. The draft was available for 77 days to solicit additional data, information, or analysis, as well as technical recommendations for management of the range. Completed February 4, 2008, after all public input was incorporated, the evaluation analyzes whether management objectives are being met and possible remedies where needed. A herd management area plan revision has been initiated based upon the evaluation and its recommendations, and could be ready for public review by spring.

Adoptions of excess horses from the PMWHR are typically conducted at the Britton Springs Administrative Site at the base of the Pryors on the Montana/Wyoming state line. Excess wild horses from other states are adopted out through annual events held throughout the region. Since 1984, more than 15,000 wild horses have been placed with qualified adopters in Montana/Dakotas.

### **MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:**

The BLM strives to manage the PMWHR primarily for the benefit of wild horses while maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and preserving multiple uses. A revision of the Pryor Mountain Herd Management Area Plan is currently in progress, involving a partnership among the Forest Service, National Park Service, and BLM. This revision will take a balanced approach to wild horse management while recognizing each agency’s authority in relation to wild horse management. It will identify and attempt to rectify habitat deficiencies that preclude allowing more animals on the range. It will also consider the preservation of unique genetic traits; the use of fertility control and animal removal for population control; range condition, carrying capacity calculations and criteria for future adjustments; and specific range improvements including water developments, vegetation treatments, and additional necessary infrastructure or maintenance.

The BLM strives to place as many excess wild horses as possible with good adopters. Support for the national Wild Horse and Burro Program is paramount for the success of Montana’s own program. Efforts are now being made to hold more adoption events than have been conducted in the recent past. Montana personnel will be called upon more often by the national office to support strategic wild horse goals throughout the BLM.

### **BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:**

Wild horse issues attract national and international attention. Local and national interest groups often are very passionate and highly involved with issues surrounding the Pryor Mountain wild horses. Some groups are interested in minimizing any human management while others are primarily concerned with the humane treatment of the horses, the economics of the horse program, or the environmental impacts wild horses have on the range. The Pryor Mountain Mustang Association and Pryor Mountain Mustang Center provide local support. Success of the wild horse and burro program is highly dependent upon partnerships and volunteer efforts with interest groups and other federal and state agencies.

### **CONTACT:**

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